

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 264

TM 013 072

AUTHOR Lotz, Mabel; Suhorsky, Joseph
TITLE Parents' and Teachers' Attitudes towards Progress Reporting Conferences.
INSTITUTION Towson State Coll., Md.
PUB DATE Feb 89
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Educational Research Association (Savannah, GA, February 23, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; *Elementary School Teachers; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Teacher Conferences; Program Evaluation; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Response
IDENTIFIERS Parent Surveys; *Progress Reporting; Teacher Surveys

ABSTRACT

A parent-teacher conferencing procedure is described, and the results of a survey designed to determine the attitudes of parents and teachers toward components and outcomes of conferences are presented. The procedure involves a 20-minute conference at the end of the first marking period (November), with report cards sent for the three remaining periods. A three-part questionnaire was developed and administered in association with conference programs at two elementary schools located in a rural/suburban county. The socioeconomic status of the students ranged from low to upper middle class. One classroom per grade per school was randomly selected for the survey. The questionnaire covered perceived importance of specific conference topics; means of treating certain topics during conferences; and various aspects of conferencing procedures including time allotment, frequency, participant confidence, student presence, overall effectiveness, and written reports. The questionnaire was distributed to 262 parents and 52 teachers and returned by 149 parents and 31 teachers. In general, results indicate that parental acceptance of the conferences was high, while teacher acceptance was less positive. Anxiety among teachers may explain the latter finding; teacher anxiety was attributed to prior negative experiences, intense scheduling, and overall workload. The questionnaire used is appended. (TJH)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED306264

The College of Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

JOSEPH SUHORSKY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Parents' and Teachers' Attitudes Towards Progress Reporting Conferences

Mabel Lotz
and
Joseph Suhorsky

Towson State University
Towson, Maryland

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

TSU



TN013072

The College of Education prepares students to enter the field of education in a variety of career settings. The College offers programs of study leading to the baccalaureate degree in education with certification to teach early childhood, elementary, and secondary education. In addition to the undergraduate degree, the College offers graduate programs in early childhood, elementary, secondary education, reading, and instructional technology.

The College is nationally accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The teacher education programs are also approved by the Maryland State Department of Education which uses the program approval standards set by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) and qualifies graduates for certification in all member states.

Towson State University traces its history to 1865. At that time the General Assembly of Maryland established a statewide public school system and authorized the first state teacher training institution: The Maryland State Normal School, later known as the State Teachers College at Towson, then in 1963, as Towson State College. Current enrollment includes 9,679 full-time undergraduates, 3,876 part-time undergraduates, and 236 graduate students.

Towson State University is committed to providing comprehensive opportunities for undergraduate and graduate education. The University is comprised of six colleges and two schools and offers a variety of programs in the traditional arts and sciences and in specialized professional fields.

In 1986 and 1987, Towson State University was named one of the top ten comprehensive colleges in the eastern United States.

Parents' and Teachers' Attitudes
Towards Progress Reporting Conferences

Mabel Lotz
and
Joseph Suhorsky

Towson State University

Paper Presented at the
1989 Annual Conference of the
Eastern Educational Research Association
Savannah, Georgia
February 23, 1989

Administrators and teachers recognize the importance of effectively communicating with parents to share with them student progress in school. Traditionally, report cards have been sent home, but social changes in the family have made it essential for administrators to seek other ways of communicating with parents. As educators recognized the importance of parental involvement in successful programs, parent-teacher conferences to report student progress have been used increasingly as a way of stimulating parental contact and involvement with the school. Although conferences have generally been accepted by the educational establishment, the acceptance or value of conferences by parents and teachers has received little attention.

This paper describes: (1) a conferencing procedure, (2) the results of a survey to determine attitudes of parents and teachers concerning components and outcomes of conferences, (3) the implications of improving the effectiveness of parent-teacher progress conferences.

The reporting procedure followed in the schools is to use a parent-teacher conference at the end of the first marking period (November) with report cards sent for the three remaining periods. Twenty minutes are allotted for each conference. Since the parent-teacher conferences demand considerable time, effort and commitment on the part of teachers and parents, the efficacy of the procedure needed to be evaluated.

A three part questionnaire was developed in part based on studies done by Hart, Beck, Noellert, and Hertel. Appropriate questions were developed and modified to suit practices in the current situation (Appendix A). The survey recipients were associated with two elementary schools located in a rural/suburban county. The socio-economic status of the students ranged from low to upper middle class. One classroom per grade in each school was randomly selected to receive the surveys. All teachers in both schools received the surveys. The questionnaire was distributed to 262 parents and 52 teachers. Completed anonymous responses were made by 149 parents (56%) and 31 teachers (60%).

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Part I Results

Part one of the questionnaire asked respondents to rank six topics according to their importance as conference topics. Responses for each item were tested with the chi square test to determine whether there were any significant differences between the parent and teacher responses. The mean value of the responses was calculated by assigning a value of six to the highest ranking and decreasing values for lower rankings with a value of one assigned to the lowest. According to the total scores for items in Part I, parents and teachers ranked them as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Ranking of Importance of Conference Topics

Ranking and topic	Mean
1- Academic progress of the child.	5.52
2- How the child learns at school.	4.51
3- How the home can help the child in school.	3.73
4- Child conforms to school standards.	2.92
5- Child gets along with classmates.	2.61
6- Schools' goals and organization.	1.83

There were no significant differences between the rankings of parents and teachers. The only item that approached statistically significant difference on the chi square statistic was the statement dealing with home help for the child. Not surprisingly, teachers viewed this item as slightly more important than did parents.

Part II Results

How certain topics were treated during the conferences was assessed in Part II. A large majority of the responses were positive for parents and teachers with the percentages for selecting "discussed thoroughly" ranging from 70.9 to 96.8%. With the high concentration of scores in the "discussed thoroughly" category, it was necessary to eliminate several cells from subsequent chi square calculations since the calculated expected frequencies fell below five. Of the eight questions, only responses to the question dealing with how the home can help the student reached the critical value needed for statistical significance at the .05 level. Table 2 data indicates that

teachers believe that the topic deserves a more thorough discussion.

Table 2

Discussion of How The Home Can Help the Child

Response Choice	Parents		Teachers	
	n	%	n	%
Discussed Thoroughly	114	87.0	22	70.9
Discussed Inadequately	17	13.0	9	29.0
n=number of responses				
Chi-square	D.F.		Significance	
4.79	1		.027	

PART III RESULTS

The third part of the survey assessed various aspects of the conferencing procedures and dealt with time allotment, frequency, participant confidence, student presence, overall effectiveness, and written reports. In making the chi square calculations, cells with expected frequencies of less than five were eliminated when they constituted more than 20 % of the expected cell frequencies. As shown in Table 3, teachers and parents agreed closely to allotment of time for the conferences.

Table 3

Question 1-Time Allotment For Conferences

Responses	Parents		Teachers	
	n	%	n	%
Too Short	28	19.6	4	5.3
Just Right	115	80.4	24	85.7
n=number of responses				
Chi-square	D.F.		Significance	
.43	1		.52	

Although there was agreement as to the length of conferences, parents' and teachers' preferences showed a significant difference as to the frequency of conferences. The data in Table 4 indicate parental desire for more conferences during the school year

Table 4
Question 2- Frequency of Reporting Conferences

Responses	Parents		Teachers	
	n	%	n	%
Once a year	21	14.2	9	29.0
Twice a year	75	51.0	18	58.1
3 or more times a year	51	34.7	4	12.9
n=number of responses				
Chi-square	D.F.		Significance	
8.54	2		.019	

More than 85% of the parents favored holding conferences more frequently than current practice of once a year.

The attitude of participants in the conferencing procedure was assessed in the third question. Results were statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 5
Question 3- How Participants Felt During Conference

Responses	Parents		Teachers	
	n	%	n	%
Completely at ease	111	78.7	14	45.2
Slightly anxious	30	21.2	17	54.8
n=number of responses				
Chi-square	D.F.		Significance	
14.41	1		.001	

As indicated in Table 5, a far greater percentage of teachers showed a degree of anxiety than did parents. This result will be examined later.

Since progress conferences focus on the student, the presence or absence of the student during a conference was examined. The decision as to who should determine whether or not a student would be present was determined.

Table 6
Question 4-Student Presence at Conference

Responses	Parents		Teachers	
	n	%	n	%
Student should be present	24	16.7	5	17.2
Student should not be present	84	58.3	10	34.5
Teacher decides	23	16.0	11	37.9
Parent decides	13	9.0	3	10.3
n=number of responses				
Chi-square	D.F.		Significance	
8.49	3		0.037	

Although the majority of parents favored not having the student present during a conference, teachers believed that the decision concerning student presence should be made by the teacher.

Parents expressed satisfaction with the overall effectiveness of the conferences. Ninety six percent of the parents viewed the conferences as good or excellent. Teacher response significantly differed.

Table 7

Question 5-Evaluation of Overall Effectiveness

Responses	Parents		Teachers	
	n	%	n	%
Excellent	67	45.3	13	41.9
Good	75	50.7	11	35.5
Fair	6	4.1	7	22.6
n=number of responses				
Chi-square		D.F.		Significance
13.41		2		0.001

Question 6 assessed whether the respondents would "prefer to receive a written report of some kind as a part of the conference?" As indicated below 59.0%, of the parents answered "yes", leaving 41.0 who responded "no". Table 8 summarizes the data from question 6.

Table 8

Question 6- Do Participants Desire a Written Report

Responses	Parents		Teachers	
	n	%	n	%
Yes	69	59.0	7	33.3
No	48	41.0	14	66.7
n=number of responses				
Chi-square		D.F.		Significance
4.73		1		0.028

A slight majority of parents would like to have written reports, but only a third of the teachers agree that this is desirable.

One question on the survey for teachers only asked whether they would like to have additional training or a workshop in conferencing techniques and procedures. Only 30% of the teachers felt a need for additional training.

In addition to the statistical data, when asked to identify the best and worst aspects of the conferences in their own words, 56 parents and 26 teachers reported the face -to-face personal contact as the best aspect. Twenty parents and 6 teachers chose to mention the lack of a written report/or grades. Five parents cited that without grades students don't know their own progress, and 5 teachers thought the worst aspect was parents asking for grades which the teacher could not give.

Summary and Implications

Parental acceptance of the conferences was very high as indicated by the positive responses dealing with the conference frequency, overall rating of the conference, and a desire for more frequent conferences. Teacher acceptance of the conferencing procedures was less positive as indicated particularly by their responses to little desire for more frequent conferences and overall effectiveness questions. These responses may be explained in part by the amount of time required for preparing and conducting conferences.

The anxiety level reported by teachers is a factor which contributes to the somewhat less than enthusiastic attitude of the teachers. Follow-up discussions with teachers revealed several explanations for the reported results. Some teachers viewed the relaxed parent attitude as positive, indicating a good parent-school relationship. Teacher anxiety was attributed to prior negative experiences, intense scheduling, and overall work load.

Administrators, who wish to develop an effective public relations program to elicit parental cooperation through reporting conferences, should consider implementing these procedures. Teachers should be made aware of data indicating that parents view reporting conferences in a positive manner. Administrators need to demonstrate through actions that conferences are important and find time to schedule conferences over a several day time period. Ideally, varying time periods for conference length should be considered and scheduled during teaching hours as well as during the evenings. It will be necessary to provide classroom coverage. Such administrative actions demonstrate commitment to the importance of conferences.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beck, Barbara B. "Improving Communication in Parent-Teacher Conferences." Master's thesis. Towson State College, 1963.
- Blase, Joseph J. "The Politics of Teaching: The Teacher-Parent Relationship and the Dynamics of Diplomacy." *Journal of Teacher Education*, 22 (March 1987), 411-418.
- Filmeyr, Frank. *Teacher's Helper: Talking with Parents*. ERIC ED, 210 857, 1980.
- Giannangelo, Duane M. "Make Report Cards Meaningful." *The Educational Forum*, (May 1975), 409-415.
- Hart, Lois B. "Dear Parents: What You Want To Know Isn't Necessarily What We Want To Tell You!" In *Degrading the Grading Myths*. Ed. Sidney Simon and James Bellanca. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1976
- Knox, Laura & Candelaria, Cynthia. "Tips For More Productive Parent-Teacher Conferences." *Learning*, 16 (September 1987), 60-61.
- Hertel, Suzanne M. *A Study of Parent Attitudes on The Parent-Teacher Conference*. ERIC ED 147 288, 1977.
- Noellert, Williams Jr. "A New Study of Parental Understanding of Pupil Progress Reporting Systems in an Inner City School." Master's thesis. Towson State College, 1966.
- Sharp, Vicki F. *Satistics: For the Social Sciences*. Boston, Little, Brown & Company, 1979.
- Statsoft. *APP-STAT Statistical Package*. Tusla: 1985.
- "Parent Teacher Conferences-Professional Point of View." *Academic Therapy*, (March 1987), 411-412.
- "Parent Teacher Conferences-Parent's Point of View." *Academic Therapy*, (March 1987), 413-418.
- Yarborough, Betty and Roger A. Johnson. "Research that Questions the Traditional Elementary School Marking System." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 61 (April 1980), 527-528.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

PART I

Directions: Please number the following topics according to how important it is to you to discuss it during the November reporting conferences. Place a number 1 next to the most important, a number 2 next to the second most important topic, and so forth.

- _____ Academic progress of the child.
- _____ How the child learns at school.
- _____ How the home can help the child do better in school.
- _____ How the child conforms to school standards.
- _____ How the child gets along with classmates.
- _____ Information on the school's goals and organization.

PART II

Directions: Please check the column which best describes how you feel the following topics were handled during the conferences.

Discussed Discussed Omitted Not
Thoroughly Inadequately But Needed Needed

1. Progress in specific subject areas.
2. Progress in relationship to abilities.
3. Relationships with others.
4. Fulfillment of responsibilities.
5. Work habits.
6. Behavior.
7. How the home can help the child.
8. What, specifically, the child is learning.

PART III

Directions: Please check the response which best describes your feelings.

1. How do you feel about the time allotted for the conference?

too short just right too long

2. How often do you believe parents and teachers should have a conference to discuss pupil progress?

not at all twice a year

once a year three or more times a year

3. Which of the following statements best describes how you felt during the conference?

completely at ease

slightly anxious

upset

confused

4. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the student being present during the conference?

student should be present

student should not be present

teacher should decide if the student should be present

parent should decide if the student is present

5. How would you rate the overall effectiveness of the parent-teacher conference as a means of reporting pupil progress to parents?

excellent

good

fair

poor

6. Did you give a written report to parents as part of the conferences? (Circle your answer)

Yes No

If no, would you prefer to give a written report of some kind to parents, as part of the conferences?

(Circle your answer)

Yes No

* 7. Do you feel your teacher training adequately prepared you for conducting parent-teacher conferences?

Yes No

* 8. Do you, at this point in your career, feel you need some type of training or guidance in the area of parent-teacher conferences?

Yes No

9. What do you believe to be the best aspect of the November reporting conferences?

10. What do you believe to be the worst aspect of the November reporting conferences?

11. Any additional comments:

Thank You!

** Teachers' questionnaires only.

**The College of Education
Towson State University
Towson, MD 21204**

(301) 321-2570



TSU